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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003191

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: GENERAL WINAI: TRT THREAT DIMINISHED, ELECTIONS ON TRACK

REF: A. BANGKOK 3058 (AMNESTY PROPOSAL)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2994 (TRT DISSOLVED)

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Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Council for National Security (CNS) Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul told the Ambassador the CNS had accomplished its main objectives; with Thaksin deposed and his party weakened, the CNS would readily leave power and restore democratic governance. In a June 8 meeting with the Ambassador, Winai discussed the recent Constitutional Tribunal ruling, progress in the constitution drafting process, and his vision of the post-election political map. The Ambassador discussed concerns about the safety of Hmong refugees, the appointment of a security advisor with a negative reputation, and the investment climate. End Summary.

EARLY ELECTION?

[1](#)2. (C) In a four-eyes meeting on June 8, the Ambassador reminded Council for National Security (CNS) Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul that the USG had welcomed Prime Minister Surayud's public commitment to hold elections in mid- to late-December. It now appeared the RTG was considering holding elections even sooner, possibly in November. This would be a highly positive development, the Ambassador said.

[1](#)3. (C) Winai replied that he saw no need for the interim administration and CNS to remain in power; they had already ousted Thaksin Shinawatra, and had overseen a weakening of his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party, most recently through the May 30 ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal (ref B). So Winai believed it was possible for elections to be held earlier than December. (Note: We have not heard of a new target date for elections, but there is widespread discussion of holding the constitutional referendum on August 19, rather than September 2. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador asked whether any figures from the CNS

intended to move into elected politics. Winai quickly replied that CNS Chairman Sonthi Boonyaratglin intended to do so. Although Winai was unaware of Sonthi's precise plan, if one existed, he said Sonthi's basic objectives were to ensure his own protection after his retirement as Army Commander, and to block Thaksin's return to power. These could best be accomplished through a move into party politics. The Ambassador cautioned that any such plunge by Sonthi or other CNS members into participatory politics would have to come through a transparent democratic procedure, i.e., election.

POLITICAL PARTIES

15. (C) The Ambassador asked about rumors that Kachit Habanananda, a Thai businessman with a military background, would head a new party serving the CNS's interests. Winai said he had never heard of Kachit before and did not know his intentions. He confirmed that the CNS did hope to work with the leaders of breakaway factions of Thai Rak Thai -- he named Somsak Thepsuthin, Pinij Jarusombat, and Suwat Liptapanlop. Winai said he had spoken recently with former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who staunchly asserted he would not lead a reconstituted version of Thai Rak Thai or otherwise front for Thaksin's interests. Nevertheless, Winai told the Ambassador that there was widespread speculation that Chavalit might think he could successfully return to the political fray.

16. (C) Winai believed the Democrat Party had a good chance to become Thailand's leading party and form a coalition that would lead a government of national reconciliation, including all parties except those consisting of hard-core Thaksin supporters, who could participate as an opposition block in the legislature. Winai believe TRT could win at most 100 seats in the next election. He admitted, though, that the

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authorities had done a poor job of explaining to the public Thaksin's abuses of power, and he concurred when the Ambassador said reliance on soldiers to sell this message at the grassroots level seemed unlikely to succeed.

17. (C) Winai claimed that he and others in the CNS had been surprised by the Tribunal's decision to bar TRT's entire executive board from politics for five years. Although initially concerned this sanction could unite TRT, Winai felt the situation had calmed somewhat in recent days. General Sonthi had intended his announcement that he could support amnesty for TRT figures (ref A) as a reconciliation measure; this proposal had been suggested to Sonthi by the dean of Thammasat University, but it drew widespread condemnation. Responding to many phone calls critical of Sonthi's statement, Winai had told Sonthi he should clarify his view, as the amnesty proposal was not well thought out and would not work. Winai told the Ambassador that the time for an amnesty might come in a couple of years, well after the next election, when the matter would be in the hands of an elected parliament.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

18. (C) The Ambassador asked Winai's view of the ongoing constitutional process. Winai said the second draft seemed likely to be much improved; he credited the drafters with including provisions in the first draft that could be excluded later, showing their responsiveness and co-opting their critics. The next draft, Winai predicted, would not establish Buddhism as a state religion; would not contain provisions for a "crisis committee" with unspecified powers; and would feature a partially-elected Senate and single-member districts in the House. Such a draft would have good prospects in the upcoming referendum. Winai said he had not seen signs that Thaksin's supporters would mobilize to defeat the constitution when it would be put

before the voters.

"ASSASSIN" BROUGHT IN AS ADVISOR

¶9. (C) Citing recent reports in the international press about the appointment of retired General Pallop Pinmanee as an advisor on security affairs, the Ambassador told Winai he had received calls from a concerned staff member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Pallop's penchant for tough talk, and his association with the brutal 2004 raid on insurgents at the Krue Sae mosque, had the potential to raise international concerns. Winai jotted a note to himself on this point. He reassured the Ambassador there was no reason to worry about Pallop. General Sonthi had decided to give Pallop this position, but it was simply advisory, and he had far less authority than when he previously worked at the Internal Security Operations Command.

HMONG REFUGEES

¶10. (C) Although Winai no longer handles refugee affairs on a daily basis, the Ambassador raised certain issues in this area, because of Winai's longstanding interest and his willingness to promote humanitarian solutions. The Ambassador first noted that Immigration Commissioner Boonruang Polpanich seemed to have misinterpreted both RTG and ROK Korean policy, in attempting to channel all North Korean refugees toward the ROK, effectively precluding them from seeking resettlement in the U.S. Winai took note of this matter and said he would look into it. (Note: The Ambassador has also raised this with MFA Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul and NSC Secretary General Prakit Prachonpachanuk, who appear sympathetic to our concern and have more formal responsibility in this matter than Winai. End Note.)

¶11. (C) The Ambassador also raised the case of 18 Hmong female minors, now apparently in the Petchabun area. Reading to Winai from the heart-wrenching testimony to Medecins Sans Frontieres of one of the minors, Mai Moua Vang, the

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Ambassador urged that these girls not be sent back to Laos. Winai displayed visible sympathy and disgust on hearing Vang's account of mistreatment by the Lao authorities.

¶12. (C) When the Ambassador then noted reports of 48 Hmong being deported to Laos from Amphoer Lom Sak in northern Thailand, Winai paused the conversation and used his cell phone to call a Thai official and request a report on this. Following the meeting, Winai phoned the Ambassador to explain that, more than one week ago, 37 new arrivals had crossed into Thailand from Laos and were sent back over the border. (Note: There was confusion on the Thai side about this matter because the group of 37 is separate from the Lom Sak group. End Note.) The military and the NSC were well aware of the USG's concern, Winai said; no Persons of Concern have been forced back to Laos. The Ambassador, noting the positive efforts of General Nipat Thonglek to set up a screening mechanism for the Hmong currently at Petchabun, requested that no Hmong be returned to Laos pending the establishment of that mechanism.

INVESTMENT CLIMATE

¶13. (C) Winai criticized the interim administration for its lack of coordination and poor performance. He believed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont had been kept out of the loop on the Health Ministry's decision to issue compulsory licenses for pharmaceutical drugs; Health Minister Mongkol Na Songkhla was "out of control," Winai observed. Nevertheless, Winai indicated further compulsory licenses were unlikely to be issued.

¶14. (C) Speaking generally about the investment climate, Winai said he understood how some might believe the Thais were becoming less welcoming of foreign investment, but he did not believe this was in fact the case. Recent moves that could appear xenophobic in fact resulted from a lack of coordination, and some misguided policies. The Thais would retain their traditional openness to foreigners, Winai said.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) We are encouraged by Winai's generally positive view of the situation. He appears to see a relatively smooth path forward, toward elections and a return to democratic governance free of Thaksin's influence. We agree this is a plausible outcome, but it is also the "best case" scenario, and we do not discount the possibility of complications that could send Thailand down a different path.

BOYCE